

HIROSHIMA



Two Japanese civilians walk on a road cleared through the dead ruins of Hiroshima. For four square miles the city was left in total destruction by the atomic bomb.

HIROSHIMA—In the bombed-out cities of Europe there were always plenty of eyewitnesses who were only too eager to tell you exactly how it was the day their house fell in. It wasn't like that in Hiroshima when I came here with the first group of Americans to enter the city since it was almost completely destroyed by our atomic bomb on Aug. 6. For the first two hours, as we walked through the utterly demolished downtown section, we couldn't find a single Jap on the streets who had been here when the bomb landed. Practically all eyewitnesses seemed to be dead or in the hospital.

"I knew lots of Hiroshima people, but only one of my friends survived safely," said the Japanese naval officer who acted as our interpreter. "He was at work in the second floor of a building. He fell through to the basement. Everybody else in the building was killed or injured, but he wasn't hurt."

The scarcity of healthy survivors gives some idea what our first and most effective atomic bomb did when it struck Japan. There's no doubt when you look at it that Hiroshima is the greatest man-made disaster in the history of the world.

You can stand at its center and for four square miles around there is nothing but total destruction. The only things left standing are a few concrete-reinforced buildings, with their insides charred and ruined, an occasional bare chimney, and trees with every limb and every leaf torn off.

The fire engines that the city needed so badly are still standing in the fire station, their radiators folded inward like accordions and their mechanisms scattered on the floor.

The hospital which people tried to reach is a hollow, blackened shell.

In parts of the outskirts the smell of the dead under the debris is unbearable. In the center of the town there are not enough ruins to hide a corpse. Everything is level ashes.

We found that the few surviving Japs who



Hirokuni Dazai, Hiroshima survivor, tells his story.

had been in Hiroshima the day the bomb fell became inarticulate when we asked them to describe what they had seen and done during the blast and during the few hours that followed the explosions. In reply to our questions, they would just stare at the ceiling and stare at the floor. Then they would make a helpless gesture with their hands and say things like, "The town was in the worst condition you can consider," or, "It

OldMagazineArticles.com

Yank: October 5, 1945

-the second of two pages-

was terrible beyond imagination." Evidently the people in Hiroshima were too shaken and too stunned to notice much about what they were doing or what was going on around them that morning of Aug. 6.

One of the Japs we talked to was a Government official named Hirokuni Dazai, a little fellow with a bandaged head who described his job as Commissioner of Public Thought Control in the Hiroshima district. Dazai returned to Hiroshima from a trip to Tokyo only 40 minutes before the bomb fell. There had been an air-raid alarm shortly before 8 o'clock that morning, but Dazai doesn't remember seeing or hearing any planes overhead. The all-clear signal sounded about five minutes past eight and the people came out of the shelters and started home to have their breakfast. Dazai was standing in front of his house between ten minutes and a quarter past eight when he saw a light moving across the sky.

"It looked like some sort of electric flash," he told us. "It was arc-shaped and bright orange." Then he was knocked to the ground by a wave of concussion. His house shook and fell apart, some of the rubble landing on top of him. That's how he got the bandage on his head. He picked himself off the ground and got his wife and two children out of the ruins. His wife had been knocked out but she came to quickly. The children were unhurt.

"Our house did not start to burn immediately," Dazai said, "but I saw great towers of black smoke advancing toward me across the city from the east, south and north."

Dazai took his wife and children to the home of a relative two kilometers away and tried to get downtown to his office, but the heat of the fire there was too overpowering. He wasn't able to go near his office until after 4 o'clock that afternoon.

The whole city burned steadily for the next two days. Dazai and other officials found relief work almost impossible, since the fire-fighting equipment and the hospitals were destroyed and almost every telegraph pole and wire was flat on the ground. Finally, the Government managed to get some help and supplies up the river by boat to Hiroshima but it wasn't enough.

Later, the trains came into the town. We noticed that there, as in Nagasaki, railroad tracks and bridges had been completely undamaged by the atomic blast. Evidently it doesn't affect things close to the ground.

We asked Dazai how many bombs he thought we'd dropped on Hiroshima. He said at first he thought the city was hit by several hundred but shortly after the blast, when he saw the whole area in burning ruins, he thought it was some new variety of "aerial torpedo." One thing that baffled him and other Japs with whom we talked and who had experienced the bombing, was the complete absence of noise in Hiroshima before and after the bomb landed. One Jap said he was deaf for a week afterward from concussion, but heard no explosion. The Japs at the naval base in Kuri about 12 miles away, however, say they heard a terrific roar. Vice-Adm. Masao Kanazawa said the effect in Kuri was like a tornado. There was "a great wind," he said, and trees around the naval base were bent to the ground by it.

The Japs who went to Manila to arrange the peace signing said their dead at Hiroshima numbered 11,000. That was a great understatement. Reading figures to us from his black notebook, Dazai estimated that the Hiroshima dead so far number around 80,000.

Hiroshima was made to order for effective atomic bombing. It is built on a river delta like New Orleans, and it is as flat as a billiard table. There are none of the hills that protected part of Nagasaki from the blast of our second atomic bomb. Hiroshima was a new and modern city, the home of many Japanese who had lived in the States and had brought back with them American ideas about houses and gardens. It had a population of 343,000 in the 1940 census. Now the population is about 120,000. Most of the residents who are injured or sick as a result of the bombing are living in battered and misshapen houses on the edges of the city.

Dazai said that when the Japs took the first count of the Hiroshima casualties on Aug. 20 there were 3,000 known dead and 30,000 missing persons who had been given up for dead. There were 13,960 "seriously wounded" and 43,500 injured. On Sept. 1 the toll of known dead was up to 53,000.

Japanese doctors who have

been attending Hiroshima casualties say that a lot of the weird stories about the effects of the atomic bombings on the civilian population are apparently true. They say that people who were only slightly wounded when the bomb fell and some others who didn't enter Hiroshima until a few hours after the bombing have died from loss of white blood corpuscles. The effect of the atomic bomb as far as they have been able to determine is about the same as over-exposure to the rays of a very powerful X-ray machine. Sufferers, say the Japanese doctors, develop a temperature of around 105°; their hair begins to fall out and they feel ill and vomit blood.

The first thing these Japanese doctors asked was if the Americans who had designed the bomb had also figured out a cure for its after-effects on the human body. So far, the Japanese have found no way of restoring the normal count of white corpuscles. They are trying transfusions, but these seem to have no effect on whatever is destroying the white corpuscles. The corpuscles added to the blood stream by a transfusion are quickly eaten up. We told the Japs that a group of American scientists were coming to Hiroshima soon to study the radioactive effects of the bomb on people and the area.

The doctors also say that the severely blistering X-ray-like burns are generally found only on the side of the body which faced the atomic blast. They say two men were fencing in Hiroshima the morning the bomb exploded. One of these was facing the direction of the blast and died almost immediately. The other, burned only on the back of the neck, lived for a week.

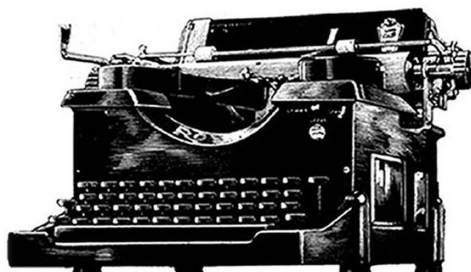
The native doctors also say that clothing serves as protection against atomic burns. People wearing thick undershirts didn't get it as badly as those who had on only a kimono or a shirt. There was a strong rumor, both among Jap civilians here and among GIs back in the Philippines, Okinawa and the Marianas, that anybody even walking into the atomic-bombed area a week or more after would be sterilized by the radioactivity in the soil. Jap doctors haven't had time to check that one yet. They think the victims who were exposed to the bombing itself may not be able to reproduce again, but they don't know for sure. Nor do they know yet how long it will be before Hiroshima will be an absolutely healthful place to live in. Some scientific writer back in the States said recently that Hiroshima's soil would be barren and radioactive for the next 70 years. One Jap doctor says this is the malarkey. He made tests of the soil in Hiroshima a few weeks ago and found no radioactivity in it.

Walking into Hiroshima in broad daylight, wearing an American uniform and knowing that you were one of the first Americans the people in the utterly ruined city had laid eyes on since the bombing, was not a comfortable feeling. I couldn't help wondering what would have happened to me if I'd been a Jap entering Brooklyn after Japan had dropped an atomic bomb, or, for that matter, any kind of bomb, on Flatbush. I was accompanied by the crew of a B-17, who were wearing Air Force insignia all over themselves like an Irishman wears green on St. Patrick's Day, and that didn't help matters. But the Hiroshima Japs—men, women and children—gave us exactly the same treatment we got in Yokohama, Tokyo, Kuri and all the other Jap towns we have visited—the same prolonged, unabashed, curious stares unmixed with any expression either of hatred or welcome.

All through Hiroshima we've passed close to men and women pointing at ashes that evidently used to be homes of relatives or friends. We've seen them at the wrecked police station trying to locate missing people and walking toward their shrines to pray. I noticed one woman leaning over a water faucet, the only thing left of her home, filling a pan to wash some clothes. There was no wreckage around her, no broken walls or glassless windows. Just the water pipe, with the faucet on the end of it, sticking up out of the ashes. "I don't feel sorry for these people," said a GI with me. "It's tough on them, sure, but it saved lots of guys' lives."

One of the Jap Navy officers acting as our interpreter was born in Sacramento, Calif. We asked him if the people in this part of Japan accepted the atomic bomb as one of the misfortunes of war and held no particular resentment against us for it. Or, we asked, do they hate us?

The officer studied his boots and then peered quizzically through his tortoise-rimmed glasses. "They hate you," he said.



OldMagazineArticles.com

OldMagazineArticles.com

MagazineArticles.com